



# FOOD NOT BOMBS



A talk given on the **Rent is Theft Tour**  
by Keith McHenry  
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121 Centre  
Brixton



**F**ood not Bombs was formed after the May 24 1980 occupation of the Seabrook Nuke in New Hampshire. Food not Bombs is one of many groups that grew out of the Clamshell Alliance, which helped sponsor the attempt. Food not Bombs' first action was to set up a soup line outside the stockholders meeting of the First National Bank of Boston. First National Bank is responsible for redlining' the areas in Boston known as Roxbury, Dorchester, South Boston, Charlestown, East Boston and the South End (a.k.a. ghettos). The First also built the Seabrook nuke and is the money behind much of the weapons industry' in New England. Food not Bombs volunteers fed hot meals to 300 homeless people as the stockholders walked by. Several stockholders talked with us and stuffed a dollar or two in our bucket to help us get started.

From that exiting beginning, we organised a schedule of food pick-ups and deliveries in Boston and Cambridge. One member worked at a natural food grocery and was able to bring the surplus to Food not Bombs. The tofu manufacturer who delivered tofu from Western Massachusetts to this store told us that they had lots of tofu that was the wrong size and that they would bring it in for us to give to the poor. A local bakery in Harvard Square gave us as many as ten garbage bags a day of old bread every morning at 7am.

We brought that food to the shelters in the South End of Boston. Every other day we would arrive at the Pine Street Inn in our old van. Six or seven men standing outside the Inn would help us carry the food to the kitchen as they thanked us for stopping by. We would go from shelter to shelter all over the South End. At each place the people in the area would give us a hand and share information about other shelters or sources of food. Over the months we became friends with people at each shelter and we lost the feeling of being outsiders.

We also had literature and food tables at rallies in Harvard Square and on Boston Common. Our literature covered a wide range of issues that we saw as being connected. Food not Bombs also sold buttons which we often designed ourselves. Our tables became a reliable place to express ideas without fear. Military men would tell us stories about war; worried people would stop to get support and expect to leave inspired; busy folk put a dollar in our buckets and told us that we were doing great work. Staff at the tables found every day to be rewarding and looked forward to their next stint on the streets- which was often the very next day.

Other activists came by with fliers about the next action their group was sponsoring and we would put them next to the buttons. It was fairly likely that Food not Bombs would have a table at that event and that we would be advertising yet another event at that action. This continues to this day.

During the first year we told thousands of people about our food distribution to shelters. At about this time, the shelters started to overflow with people. Food not Bombs asked the public to start donating food directly to the shelters as well as to Food not Bombs. We started to include housing projects on our regular routes. Before long we were delivering food to every project in Cam-

bridge as well as several projects in Boston. After a few years, Food not Bombs became the official food distribution group of the City of Cambridge. Today, this distribution part of Food not Bombs is called the Food for Free Committee of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Food not Bombs found that the people in need of this food and the people gathering the food were one people. Many of these people saw that the government spends millions of dollars on the military while millions of people go hungry every day. We also found that we were the ones who were going to change this injustice: not someone in the government.

**T**hen, in 1988, I moved to San Francisco. That's supposed to be the most liberal city in the United States, so we thought there would be no problem to set up a second Food not Bombs group there. We took notes on how we were going to start the group because the first one just sort of happened by accident and we wanted to have a pamphlet. These other people were contacting us saying they were interested in doing the same thing and wanted to have tips and ideas on how to get started. So we took notes about what kind of things we did and what worked and what didn't.

One of the mistakes we made was that we wrote a letter to the [state] government telling them that we were going to serve every Monday at the entrance to Golden Gate Park. We didn't hear any news from them and we figured that [it was] a really liberal government and so on. But it turned out that they were trying to drive 'dead heads' and hippies, who were living in buses, from away from the Golden Gate Park area because they wanted to increase the property values of that neighbourhood. In fact, they were renaming the neighbourhood, Haight Ashbury- which has been famous since the 'Sixties, Cole Valley so it wouldn't have the 'stigma' of hippies.

On August 15th 1988, we got our response. Forty-five riot police came out of the woods and they arrested nine of us for sharing free food. Three of the nine were women who had been at San Francisco's oldest soup kitchen, Saint Anthony's. They had been serving this huge line of people and were plainly just doing charity and they wanted to organise against the economic policies of the government and the causes of homelessness and hunger. They joined our group and this ended up being their first day with us, and they ended up in jail. That month, the San Francisco Police and the Mayor made over one hundred arrests for distributing free food.

At the end of that, the Mayor became very embarrassed: the London Times and the Manchester Guardian- lots of different papers all round the world, started reporting on this case. It made the New York Times, it was on C.N.N.. People were outraged that you could get arrested for sharing free food, so the Mayor needed to stop the arrests and gave us a permit.

Of course, if they can give you a permit they can take it away and that's what they ended up doing. Next summer the Police Department drove the homeless from the city because the tourist season was starting. The homeless people organised a protest in front of City Hall in City Center Plaza and we set up a tent city. We had

signs that announced the police attacks against homeless people and said iHomeless People Have Human Rights Too!. The first night, the police brought the Fire Department who sprayed them with water and hit them with night sticks and threatened to seize people's dogs and so on and tried to drive them away. They only brought about twenty cops and this fire battalion, so people ended up staying.

The next day at lunch, the people came and said 'We're very upset: they've sprayed us with water, they're attacking us, we need your support.' We got all these stories: everybody told us their story of what happened to them the night before. So we decided to join them in their protest. We set up a tent with a propane stove and all the cooking equipment and brought lots and lots of food and started giving away free vegetarian food: all night long, so that there would be people there waiting in case the police came. If anyone was going to sleep, there'd be this way to hang out. We had musical instruments; we started this whole kind of party that just lasted all evening; and it turned out that it lasted twenty-seven days and we served new vegetarian food twenty-four hours a day. By that time, the government was able to convince the media, or rather work with the media, and created this image that we were drug dealers, litterbugs, diseased, and all the 'normal' things that the media says about poor people. So the police thought that they could drive us from the park, and they did: they brought lots and lots, about a hundred,



riot police and forced us out of the park.

The next summer, the same thing happened. The police attacked the homeless; the homeless people organised this tent city; they invited us to join them: this time as they were organising the actual event- they told us in advance that they were going to do this. We set up our tents and started serving food again, and the police brought in a carnival: a fair, with ferris-wheels and stuff, to try to make it very hard to see what we were doing in the park, and also to keep it noisy all the time, all night long- thinking homeless people wouldn't want to live with carnivals and ferris- wheels and bumper cars. They made another hundred arrests and drove us from the park: and so, essentially, that summer was very similar to the one before.

The next summer, there was an election. The Mayor would not attack us because that would make it a campaign issue. He was able to keep the police from harassing the homeless as much, so no tent city developed in protest. Then, the current Mayor was running for election. The former Chief of Police announced that he would run for Mayor of San Francisco, and that he had a plan to solve the homeless crisis. His idea was that he would round up all the homeless people and take them to a labour camp south of the city; and he would even have a sign over the entrance that said 'Work Shall Make You Free.' This was his announcement of a big plan that he would be the one person who could end the crisis of homelessness in San Francisco. He gained support from this white supremacist group called 'The Sunset Boys' who were calling for racial purity in the Sunset district of San Francisco. As it turns out, it's a predominantly Asian-American community now, and they wanted it to be an Irish-American community, so they were very excited: any attack against people of colour was great by them. They worked as campaign organisers and put up signs for the [prospective] Mayor and pulled down opponents' signs and organised leafleting campaigns and so on. He became the Mayor and so he had to 'solve the homeless crisis'.

What he announced were two different things. He was able to gain the Clinton administration's support to host the Mayors' Conference on Homelessness and Hunger in San Francisco. He was going to be this expert on homelessness and what caused the problem nation-wide. He was even proposing to export it [the Plan] to the Mayor of Moscow, and eventually, actually, the programme was adopted by the Moscow City government, and to New York City. He was also hoping it would go other places: Salt Lake City announced they were going to adopt this plan, as well as other cities in the 'States. The name of his plan was Quality of Life Enhancement Matrix Program. What the Program consisted of was that teams of police officers and garbage men and psychiatrists would go throughout the park and the city streets and they would identify homeless people who were supposed to be mentally ill and put them in mental hospitals. Also, in California there's a law called '647i - Intent to Lodge'. This law was passed during the Great Depression in the 'Thirties. What it says is that you're breaking the law if you possess a sleeping bag or a blanket; if you have a suitcase or a shopping cart or a backpack; boxes; any kind of large items that size. You can get, I think, about six months in jail for possessing

these items, and maybe a ten-thousand -dollar fine.

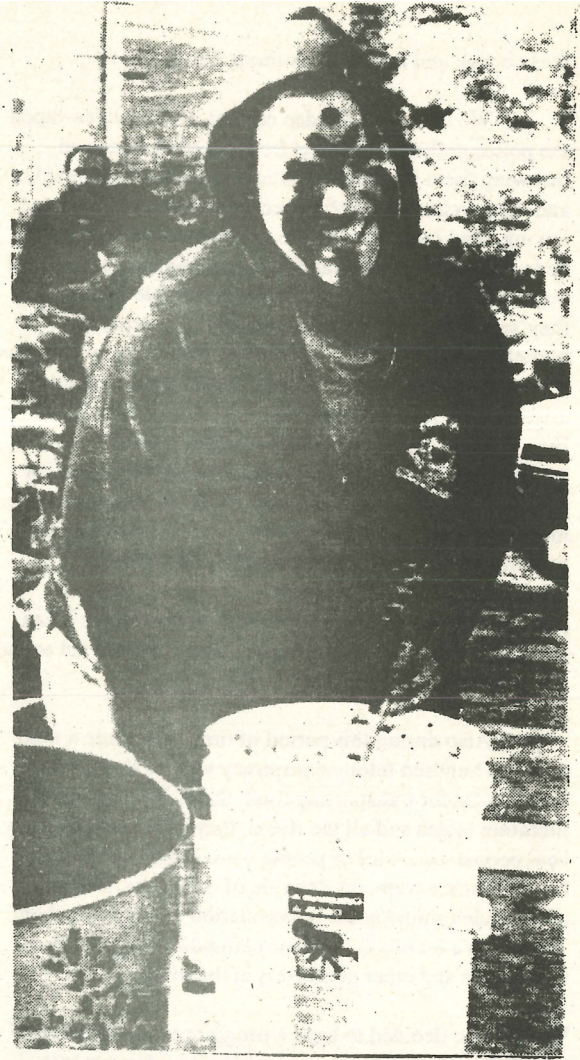
We borrowed a video camera and we video-taped the police grabbing blankets from people's arms and throwing them into garbage trucks; and arresting people; and the psychiatrists saying people were mentally ill and having them taken away. We got that shown on the T.V. news, so the Mayor of San Francisco freaked out on Food not Bombs: saying 'These people are trouble-makers, they're interfering with this Grand Plan to drive the homeless from the city.' He ordered the police to arrest us on September 3rd 1993. Fifteen people were violently arrested and charged with Felony: Conspiracy to Serve Free Food. This started what became a total of seven hundred felony conspiracy arrests: the last one being on June 27th [1996]- that I'm aware of, there may have been more- it's hard to contact San Francisco. I was the last person I know of who was arrested, and it was for possession of bagels and oatmeal on June 27th of this year, which was the opening day of Robert Nores Khan doing this sixty-day jail sentence for serving a bagel and a cup of soup on October 3rd 1994.

Also during this period of time they made a total of seven hundred felony conspiracy arrests, they took fifteen vans for transporting food, they took forty-seven literature tables and all the flyers, they took our food, they beat people up. A lot of people were injured serving free food. Women were, on a couple of occasions, stripped and paraded round at the police station to humiliate them. There was a lot of very intense clampdown against Food not Bombs and other organisers at that time.

**W**e decided to have a programme inviting each organisation to risk arrest, one day a month, serving free food. We had the head priest and a group of nuns who worked at Saint Anthony's: they came out in their vestments and were arrested serving free food. Several labour unions came out and were arrested serving free food; other Food not Bombs groups like Berkeley and Santa Cruz Food not Bombs were arrested; the Grey Panthers were arrested for sharing food; I.U.D.A., which is homeless and undocumented homeless Latino people, were busted and their van was confiscated for transporting bread; this went on and on and on.

The Mayor said that he had to end this altogether. He apparently felt that I was somehow a ringleader: they needed to demonise someone like Norriega or Saddam Hussein, so I got to be that guy for Food not Bombs. They ran a smear campaign in the newspapers, then on January 1st 1994 they made this law in California, that's now a national law, called 'Three Strikes'. It's named after the baseball game in the United States where if you swing the bat three times and you miss the ball, you're out. If you have two violent or serious felonies, and they have lists of what these felonies might be, and any other conviction- that could be a misdemeanour like stealing a pizza, that you're arrested for and convicted of, you can do twenty-five years to life. Basically, you have to appeal for your freedom after twenty-five years, and the likelihood is that you will do life in prison and never be freed.

On the fourth day of this law, the Mayor's film commissioner punched me in the back of the head while I was making a 'phone call at a payphone in City Hall.



About twenty minutes later, these plainclothes cops approached me and said we want to talk to you. They said 'We have to arrest you, and you are charged with felony assault, battery and strong-arm robbery.' I ended up in jail for ten thousand dollars bail and was freed about a-week-and-a-half later. We had resorted to borrowing plastic milk crates from this vegetarian restaurant near City Hall: we had five of them set up with our flyers and buckets of food, trying to simulate tables, in front of City Hall because the cops had taken so many [tables] and we couldn't get any more. The police came, they took our milk crates, our food and our flyers, then they charged me with felony possession of stolen property. That became a potential second 'strike'.

I was freed eventually, and we had just received a fax from Amnesty International in London saying that if we were convicted we would be considered Prisoners of Conscience. We made copies of this flyer. We were attending a meeting, some kind of group had called a hearing, at City Hall, and we were going door-to-door, me and a friend, to the different offices. We went to this one office and gave her the flyer and she started screaming at us: the woman who was the aide for this conservative politician. She slammed the door on both of us, and I put my hand out and the glass turned out to be very brittle and thin, and it broke and cut my hand. So I went to my truck and the police followed the trail of blood to my truck and I was arrested and charged with my third 'strike', which was felony assault with a deadly weapon: the weapon



being the door. I ended up in jail again, this time for one hundred thousand dollars bail, and spent six months in jail. David Nadel of the People's Park Defence Committee, who owns a night club called Ashkenaz, put up the title to his building and I was freed eventually to await trial.

**T**he first day of the trial was the same day as O.J. Simpson's opening day, so it turned out there was no news media or any real interest in people facing life imprisonment for people being involved with Food not Bombs, but of course plenty of interest and thousands of cameras from around the world at the O.J. Simpson trial. Three hundred people showed up to support us: which is a very large protest for a court case early in the morning in San Francisco- nine o'clock/ eight-thirty. Riot police lined the front of the Courthouse and when we got inside there were riot police in the hallways and riot police inside the courtroom. They chose a bullet-proof courtroom so the jury and the judge would be safe and would not be injured in case of the violence that was supposed to happen because we were so dangerous. Fortunately, however, it was such a fiasco that the judge decided to choose another day for the trial. He chose October 31st.

October 31st was Halloween, so people came in costume with masks, we were dressed as ghosts, witches, cops, etc.. People were arrested giving away 'trick-or-treat' candy in front of the Courthouse. Some of us made it inside because there was a court order against wearing make-up, so it took a lot of the people a long time to get into the courtroom. As people were trying to get in, the judge announced that it was not a good day for the trial, and he was going to choose another day. He chose February 14th. About three hundred people showed up in Valentine's Place, gave away chocolate hearts and people were arrested, and the whole basic fiasco happened again. Well, the judge said 'This is not a good day either: we'll get back to you with when we want the next court date.'

The next morning we received a 'phone call saying they wanted to settle the case: that they're tired of this case. At this time there was a U.N. investigation into the attacks by the City of San Francisco- we'd been in the Amnesty International human rights report for 1995; they said 'We'll agree to anything.' So I said 'Well, I'm innocent, I didn't do anything: I won't accept any kind of thing except no penalty at all.' They got back to us and said 'We'll tell the Mayor that you're a felon, but we'll tell you that it's not a 'strike' felony and then you'll have no penalty at all and that'll get the Mayor off our backs.' We decided that that was better than facing life in prison, and we'd be free to go around and do what we wanted. I was free to get arrested serving food, so I was arrested four times and many people were arrested after this for serving free food. We were free to be arrested taking over buildings; operating unlicensed radio stations; that kind of thing.

**D**uring all of this we had started two other projects. One was Homes not Jails, where we would squat abandoned buildings. The way that this worked was we would find abandoned buildings that were in bankruptcy dispute- where no-one was claiming ownership. Then we'd put new locks on each of the buildings we had identified. We would then, at dinner, tell people



'We have a free building for you if you'd like', and so the people who'd gathered to eat would be given the key and we'd give them directions to the building. That night, people would move into these houses, and the next morning we would arrive dressed in hard hats and with our tool belts and ladders, right at nine o'clock in the morning. We would pull down the boards and start painting the front of the buildings and people living around the area would go: 'Wow! This is fantastic! This old destroyed building is now being fixed up and people are moving in and now it's being rented.' So we turned on the electricity and the water and the gas, and people just lived there rent-free without paying for utilities. We squatted a few houses in San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, Western Massachusetts where homeless people have gotten off the streets and are working with Homes not Jails.

Also, we started two pirate radio stations- Free Food Radio Stations: one in Berkeley and one in San Francisco. We did this right after the Persian Gulf War because there was such a news 'whiteout' of all the news of what was going on- people being killed in Iraq; and the fact that there were huge demonstrations all over and there was no news about the fact that these protests were happening. We were fined immediately- twenty-five thousand dollars for each station. We had no money, so the federal government took us to court. We refused to stop broadcasting, and after two court appearances it became clear that the government had failed to make a law that governed low-watt F.M. radio transmitters. Our transmit-

ters were one hundred watts, so fell below what the government felt was a reasonable power to broadcast at. The government felt that no-one would do a small community radio station because, obviously, you couldn't sell advertising and make any money: so who would ever do something so small that they only broadcast four or five miles up to maybe ten miles?

It turned out that the judge agreed with that [interpretation of the law] and told the Federal Communications Commission to make guidelines for radio stations under one hundred watts. The federal government has yet to come back with those guidelines. Meanwhile, we went all over the United States helping to set up unlicensed radio stations in as many cities as possible. So now there's three hundred free radios in the U.S. that are operating at about forty-five to fifty watts each and more stations are on the air all the time.

**S**ome of the other things that we organised were protests against the prison industry. There are two million prisoners in U.S. prisons and, of course, prison labour is a big problem in the United States: many prisoners are forced to work in prisons. In fact, nine billion dollars in profits were made by U.S. prison labour last year for U.S.-based corporations. People are probably aware that Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Act in August which meant that welfare is no longer a federal programme but a state programme; that you only get it for two years then you're off; you have to wait a waiting period before you can go back [on]; and you have a total of five years in your whole life. Immigrants were immediately cut off, including [those who] were born in the United States but whose parents were undocumented and were born outside the country. This kind of oppression is becoming more and more widespread.

Whittier Food not Bombs, in Southern California this week has been photographed again. Every week they serve in Central Park there and there was a trial, which I don't know the outcome of, that happened a couple of weeks ago- or was about to happen: it may not have happened yet. I did hear that the last two Sundays Witia were photographed by police who apparently did every-thing to try to stop them. Other Food not Bombs groups, like in Calgary, Quebec City and Montreal, have been arrested. In Quebec City, the Food not Bombs house was raided and four volunteers were jailed and accused of attempting to overthrow the Quebec provincial government after anti-nationalist protests that happened on the national holiday. They were, incidentally, serving food at that protest. The other people were freed when the jail was flooded and they had to release everybody from Quebec City jail!

I decided, along with the other people in the Food not Bombs collective who do the menu and the Food not Bombs radio network in San Francisco, to go on a tour and try to connect with as many activists in Europe as possible. I've been in Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Holland and now here. The Food not Bombs book was translated into Spanish and three thousand copies were distributed in Spain. There's a lot of interest in people starting to fight back against the corporations. Of course, with the new free trade Agreements and welfare cuts in every country and so on, it's becoming

more important for activists to start uniting across national borders. The corporations don't recognise national borders, they only expect poor people to have to abide by these borders. Hopefully, we can start working more together on different projects so that there's resistance against these welfare cuts and attacks; police violence; the prison system that comes with N.A.F.T.A. [and G.A.T.T.]; the cuts in education and healthcare.



*Have you had any problems finding food?*

No, the food is very easy to get- I'm sure you have the same kind of thing here in London. All the grocery stores in the city and those stalls down by the Tube [in Brixton] get their food from warehouses that are out on the edge of the city or someplace in the city. What we usually do is to go and ask the people at the produce warehouses if they have any food that they're tossing out. We make bicycle carts out of shopping carts and we ride around the city and pick the food up with bicycle carts.

*What relationship do you have with other charities serving food in San Francisco?*

Well, in San Francisco there's a lot of food kitchens and we get along with most of them, although there are several that are directly connected to the government who are used as a way to attack Food not Bombs. For instance, the head of this one charity said that Food not Bombs was responsible for the police beating up the Afro-American homeless people because we went out serving food, so of course the police had to attack those people for living outside. That one group, during the first day that we were arrested [and in custody] during any of these series of arrests, went round to where we got food and said 'We're here to pick up the food that Food not Bombs can't pick up anymore.' Often, we take food to the shelters because we collect so much food. There's an organisation called 'Foodnet' of which everybody who distributes free food in the city is a member: except for [a few] Church organisations. The Salvation army won't get involved in that. They attack us as well. During December, about 15th December, they bring this huge van that cost several hundred thousand dollars. They park right next to us and try to get their door up in front of our tables so that no-one can see the sign or get to the free food. They hand out a glossy magazine and a cup of noodle soup to people. They operate a shelter for fifty men and they tell everybody that if they see people eating at Food not Bombs they can't have the lottery ticket to get any food or shelter.

*How have the police reacted to the squats that you've opened connected with Food not Bombs?*

On some occasions, if we announce publicly that we're taking over a building, that it's going to be a protest, they will try to keep us from getting into the building and they'll arrest us. However, when it's not a publicly announced squat they tend to be pretty supportive. From their point of view, these are buildings that might catch fire; often the buildings will be used by crackheads; and some of them were used as places for prostitutes to work. So they think that we're better than these other people. Now on occasion, the prostitutes and crackheads insisted that they get to have the space, and then we would leave, because they need a place to live too. It's not our place to tell other people how to live in their squats. Sometimes, of course, and you may have this here, you can't tell by the building if people are really making a go of it there, or are just occasionally smoking crack there, or whether prostitution is really going on there or not.

*Are many Food not Bombs activists squatting themselves?*

In many cities that's definitely happening. In San Francisco, a lot of Food not Bombs people are squatting. A lot of the squats are relatively low-key, so there's not a lot of tension around defending them from the police. Baltimore Avenue in West Philly is a very heavily squatted neighbourhood. If you look out here [Railton Road], I don't know if all these buildings are squatted, but essentially it looks just like that- except all squatted. The police have no impression that it's so heavily squatted because it's happened for so many years that the City has really had a policy that it's better that people live in these buildings and fix them up because they were catching fire and costing them a lot of money. So there's been an arrangement where eventually the Sheriff sometimes will offer them at an auction, and many times the squatters are the only bidders- so the squatters try to keep the building in slight disrepair so that it's not attractive to realty speculators, but not such bad disrepair that it pisses-off the authorities.

In New York City, of course, The Shadow [magazine] has really good articles on the 13th Street squats, but there's also this Food not Bombs squat where people are fighting against the cops on the Lower East Side. It's starting to feel like an anarchist community in the South Bronx. Every city's got these different squatting communes: there are several groups in Seattle operating 'Homestead', which applies to buildings sometimes. Squatters end up getting these large buildings and then become 'managers': start having organised living spaces for two hundred homeless people. In Seattle they also have Homes not Jails. Same thing in St. Louis: there's these mansions down this road called University Avenue, and you can get yourself a free mansion! You can just take them- no-one cares!

*Has there been much support for jailed Food not Bombs activists?*

There have been some great rallies. In one jail I was in, I had a window where I could see the protest outside. Another time, when I was released, there was a torchlight march and two-hundred-and-eighty people were arrested. It was at the end of a series of arrests: black protests, peace protests, etc.. The inmates were chanting iFood not Bombs! as people came in. That was very intense. Also, when I was released once, I had to go down the whole tier [of cells] and everyone stood chanting at the bars: iFood not Bombs!- very loudly! It echoed through the whole jail. The Sheriff who was walking with me really freaked out! Sometimes you get books in prison, but the only book I got in six months was the Bible: which I was not too impressed about. It was a special prison edition Bible, too. It talked all about the need to respect authority and that God says that the police are always right and just. Certainly not the standard Bible!

*Have you heard much about Atlanta [Olympics]? Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin was here a couple of years ago and he was saying at that time that people were starting to get organised there against the Olympics because, as is often the case, homeless people were being moved out and*



*low-cost housing was being knocked down to build Athlete City, etc.. Have you had any experience of how they've treated people in Atlanta?*

I went down to the protest during the Olympics. We gave out food to about two hundred people every day. We marched it right by where the bombing was every night during the Olympics except from the day after the bombing. Then we did it in this other neighbourhood, this poor neighbourhood. Lorenzo was very involved with Food not Bombs throughout that whole time. The Food not Bombs group there was kind of conservative, though: a little bit conservative for Lorenzo's tastes, so he's considering setting up another Food not Bombs himself. He thought that they were sort of older people, more timid; didn't want to challenge authority or make too much of a scene; and, for instance, didn't try to organise a protest against the fare increase. They raised the rates of the buses and subway because of the Olympics and there could have been a lot more protests in advance of us getting there. A lot of people started during the Olympics.

*They admit that, or were they being quite coy about the connection between the Olympics and the fare increases?*

Yeah, they were saying that they had to do it to help pay for the Olympics. The Olympics were really crazy. The City government and the Olympic Committee were saying that there were going to be two million people showing up, but approximately two hundred thousand showed instead of two millions. So all the vendors went bankrupt and nobody could sell anything. First they arrested about seven thousand homeless people or drove them out of town. They ordered all the soup kitchens shut down: so, we defied it and all the other soup kitchens opened up too. There were all these new homeless people who came there to work at the shops and who became unemployed and who were now without money wandering around Atlanta. A can of Coke cost five dollars! That's incredible! We had this big banner: iStop Corporate Greedi, and iEnjoy Corporate Greedi that looked like the Coca Cola logo, and we were marching through the streets and people were cheering us. At first, we thought that we would be hassled by the people who were going to see the Games, but it turned out that they were really excited that we were there because whenever you entered any arena there was a huge Coke bottle made of plastic twenty storeys tall. Yeah, the Olympics were intense. It was so hot there, and there was a lot of internal arguments among the different activist groups there.

# ***Seven Steps to Organizing a Local Food Not Bombs***

At the outset, starting a Food Not Bombs might seem like more than you can handle. Work on the basics, taking one step at a time. There is no need to feel pressured to accomplish everything at once. It might take a couple of weeks to get things rolling, or it might take months. One person cannot be a Food Not Bombs group, but one person can be the "starter" of one group.

Once you have made the decision to start a local Food Not Bombs group, pick a meeting date, time, and place, and gather together everyone interested to talk about what you would like to do. You might start with a group of friends, or members of an existing group, or it could be people who respond to posters announcing your intentions.

The following is a step-by-step process to get your food operation up and running. Because of your unique situation, you may need to add, ignore, or reorder steps. Follow the path you feel will work best for your group.



**Step 1** Start by getting a phone number and mailing address. By using either a voice mailbox or an answering machine, you can have an outgoing message with information about the next meeting time and place, and receive messages so that you never miss a call. Likewise, use a commercial mailbox or post office box for your permanent address.

**Step 2** Make flyers announcing the existence of a local Food Not Bombs group. By handing them out at events, posting them around town, or mailing them to your friends, you will get additional volunteers. It is helpful to have regularly scheduled, weekly meetings and always know the date of the next one.

**Step 3** Arrange for the use of a vehicle. Among the members of your group, there might be enough vehicles of the right size for your needs, but if not, you might be able to borrow a van or truck from a sympathetic church group or similar organization. If you are very lucky, you could be able to find someone to donate one to you. If none of the above succeeds, you can always hold fund-raising events specifically for the purchase of a van.

**Step 4** With flyers in hand, begin looking for sources of food. The first places to approach are the local food co-ops and health food stores. These types of stores tend to be supportive and are a good place to practice your approach. Tell them you plan to give the food to shelters and soup kitchens to feed hungry people, and if they are interested and willing, arrange for a regular time to pick up the food each day or as often as practical. Where appropriate, leave literature that explains what Food Not Bombs does.



**Step 5** Deliver your collected food to shelters and meal kitchens. It is important to get to know the food pantries and soup kitchens in your area. Learn where they are located, whom they serve, and how many they serve. This information will help you to plan your delivery route and to distribute the appropriate types and amounts of food to each program. It is usually desirable to arrange a regular delivery schedule with each kitchen.

**Step 6** Once this network becomes established, start to skim some food out of the flow without disrupting the program. With this food, prepare meals to serve on the streets. Go to rallies and demonstrations first; there, your group can recruit more volunteers, collect donations, and lift the spirits of those at the event. Giving out meals at a rally builds community and supports the cause in a very direct way.

**Step 7** Once enough people are involved, consider serving meals in a visible way one day a week to the homeless on the street. Cooking and serving food there builds community within the group and is hard work, but this is also great fun. Pick highly visible locations because part of our mission is to help make the invisible homeless more visible. We also want to reach out to everyone with our political message of Food Not Bombs, and we want to be accessible.



# Contacts

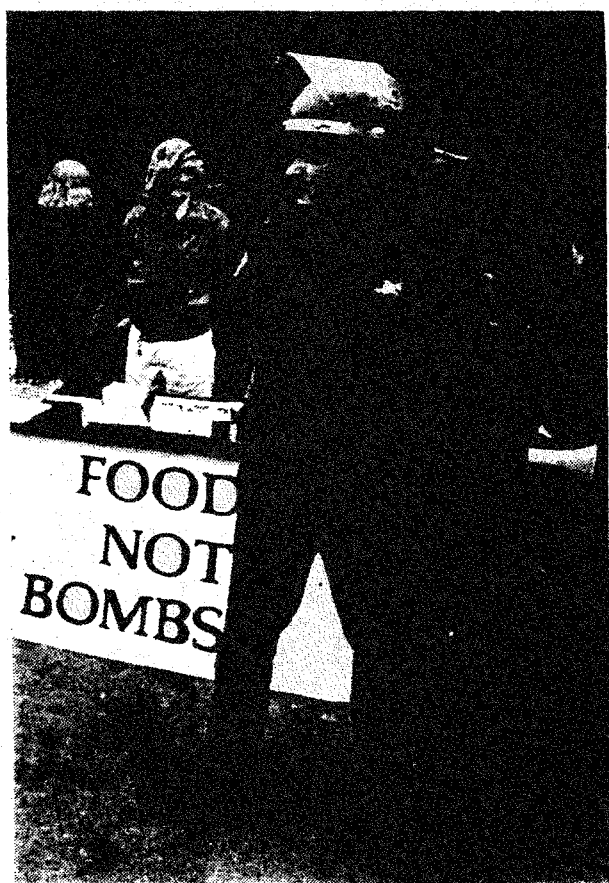
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Serving 3/4pm Brixton Oval





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